

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

I-70 WIRELESS COMMUNICATION SITES PROJECT

January 2006

**Beaver Ranger District
Fishlake National Forest**



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INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The proposed action evaluated by this I-70 Wireless Communications Sites Project Environmental Assessment (EA) is to designate two non-broadcast communications sites through a land use allocation in the land management planning process on the Fishlake National Forest. The proposed communications sites are located along the I-70 Corridor between Fremont Indian State Park and Cove Fort junction with I-15 south of Richfield, Utah.

The documents cited in this EA and additional project documentation, including resource specialist reports and detailed analyses of project-area resources, can be obtained from the Fishlake National Forest. The findings in those resource specialist reports are incorporated by reference into this EA.

Communications sites are one of the special uses recognized in the Fishlake National Forest Land and Resource Management (LRMP). There are currently seven mountain top locations on the Forest where leases for communications sites have been authorized. This type of land use allocation is made through the land management planning process contained in Forest Service Manual (FSM) 1920.

Initially Forest received a proposal for location of two new communications sites that would accommodate one personal communications services (PCS) user on National Forest System (NFS) land. This proposal was reviewed under the current Special Use Proposal process and guidelines. This process must be completed prior to accepting a proposal to use NFS lands as a Special Use Application. The process includes determining if there is other interest for like use of the NFS lands. It was determined that there were several qualified companies who were interested in this use.

As a result of this interest, three licensed cellular companies and one tower company entered into an agreement with the Forest to analyze the prospect of construction two new wireless telecommunications sites along western portion of the Interstate 70 (I-70) Corridor between Cove Fort and Fremont Indian State Park in south central Utah.

The wireless communications service is a category regulated by the Federal Communications Commission (FCC). Wireless communications services include cellular, PCS and ESMR (enhanced specialized mobile radio) technology. The FCC regulates this service through issuance of licenses. The FCC license assigns frequencies and geographic areas to service providers (carriers). The carriers included in this proposal are Verizon, Sprint and Cellular One. D.W. Towers is also included as a tower company.

The Forest Service has been given direction from Congress and the President to facilitate implementation of the Nation's strategy for wireless communications. On August 10, 1995, President Clinton released a memorandum entitled "Facilitating Access to Federal Property for the Siting of Mobile Services Antennas." In this memorandum, the following is stated:

Upon request, and to the extent permitted by law and where practicable, executive departments and agencies shall make available, Federal Government buildings and lands for the siting of mobile service antennas.

On February 8, 1996, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 was enacted, giving further direction to federal agencies. In response to the memorandum and the Telecommunications Act, the General Services Administration released a bulletin listed in the Federal Register on June 16, 1997, titled "Placement of Commercial Antennas on Federal Property." This bulletin provides general guidelines and processes for implementation of President Clinton's memorandum. Regarding granting of siting requests, the bulletin states:

Requests for the use of property, right-of-way and easements by duly authorized telecommunications service providers should be granted unless there are unavoidable conflicts with the departments or agencies mission, or current or planned use of the property or access to that property.

Communications sites on NFS lands must be designated in FLRMP's before development can occur. The proposed amendments to the LRMP's requires that an EA be prepared in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act 1969 (NEPA). This EA will analyze the impacts of constructing a wireless telecommunications system along the west portion of the I-70 corridor between Fremont Indian State Park and Cove Fort, Utah.

The expanding demand for wireless communications has resulted in a focused and determined effort by Industry to locate new tower sites throughout the Nation. This effort has historically been conducted by individual carriers working on their own in attempt to gain a competitive edge by securing new sites for towers. Co-location of carriers at the same site has been difficult in the past because of the competitive nature of the industry.

In the past when approached by a cellular company the Forest Service was able to meet basic needs by authorizing use of existing communications sites on mountain tops. With the entry into the market of digital systems (PCS) it has become apparent that existing sites cannot provide the coverage that is mandated by the carrier's FCC licenses. Consequently the Forest Service has decided through the applicable requirements it was necessary to evaluate the scope of potential environmental impacts of accommodating industry needs.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The Fishlake National Forest is proposing to designate two new communications sites, as described in the Alternatives Section, in response to the request from industry demonstrating the need to provide continuous communications along the I-70 freeway between Fremont Indian State Park and Cove Fort junction.

Purpose and Need for the Proposal

This section summarizes the existing and desired conditions in the project area, which led to the purpose of and need for the proposed action.

Existing Condition

The Telecommunications Act of February 8, 1996, directs federal agencies to help facilitate implementation of the Wireless Telephone Industry's system, in compliance with existing law, by making federal lands and facilities available for communications sites. The Commercial Mobile Radio Service providers have expressed the need for more tower sites along the I-70 corridor to provide the service the public is demanding and to fulfill obligations mandated by their FCC licenses. There is very little private land in this area, none of which would provide suitable line of site required for wireless communications purposes; consequently Industry has requested to develop two new communication sites on NFS lands. This analysis will identify suitable sites and analyze potential impacts of construction of these sites.

I-70 is a major east/west transportation corridor in South Central Utah that travels through the Fishlake National Forest. Currently, there are many areas along the I-70 corridor where there are long breaks in wireless telephone coverage. The wireless carrier's FCC licenses require that they provide continuous coverage for certain geographic areas. The I-70 corridor between Cove Fort and Fremont Indian State Park has several wireless communications providers licensed by the FCC.

There are existing towers on mountain tops within the Forest. However these sites do not provide the continuous coverage or line of site that is required to complete the wireless communications system for this portion of the I-70 corridor.

Purpose and Need for the Action

The proposed action responds to direction from The Telecommunications Act of February 8, 1996, which directs federal agencies to help facilitate implementation of the Wireless Telephone Industry's system, in compliance with existing law, by making federal lands and facilities available for communications sites. Emergency service providers, I-70 travelers, current and future communications users benefit from the expanded communication opportunities.

ALTERNATIVES, INCLUDING THE PROPOSED ACTION

Alternative 1 – No Action

Under the No Action Alternative, the proposed communications sites would not be constructed. This alternative represents the existing condition against which the action alternative is compared. The project area would remain in its current condition and current trends would continue. The result would be continued lack of access for communications providing coverage to emergency and public use.

Alternative 2 – Proposed Action

The Fishlake National Forest is proposing to designate two non-broadcast communications sites. Each proposed site would consist of a land allocation, approximately one acre in size, on which would be located an equipment building(s) and self-supporting communication tower(s) necessary to provide needed communications services to the public. The tower height(s) could vary depending on the location and number of users. (For example: one 180' self-supporting tower could accommodate up to

six cellular providers, if a seventh cellular provider required accommodation, an additional self-supporting tower and support/equipment building could be added on the site. In all cases the designated area would not be increased, tower height will be less than 200 feet and towers will be designed to accommodate more than one user.) A typical site layout and tower configuration is represented in Appendix B.

The proposed sites are identified as Cove Fort Summit and Mud Flats. Cove Fort Summit as proposed, would be located in Sevier County, Section 30, Township 25 South, Range 5 West; Mud Flats would be located in Sevier County, Section 8, Township 26 South, Range 4 1/2 West, SLBM, as shown on the location map (Appendix B).

Approximately 0.5 miles of new road would be constructed to provide access to the Mud Flats site. Power to both sites could be provided through a drop-down conversion, installing a step-down transformer from an existing powerline near the proposed sites, this would require utilizing approximately .10 acre for the receptacles. Power lines will be installed adjacent to the access road carrying electricity from the transformer to the Mud Flats site. These support activities would require land use of up to one acre of NFS lands bringing the total land use to approximately three acres.

Project Specifications

As part of the proposed action, the following specifications would be implemented in order to mitigate potential impacts to resource conditions:

1. Safeguard against the electrocution of large raptors including the bald eagle by following established guidelines for raptor protection around powerlines.
2. Communications towers will be free standing, less than 200 feet tall and unlighted
3. Co-location is required on each tower.
4. Monitor power lines and towers monthly for first year after installation to detect any avian mortality, including raptors. If mortality is documented, additional remedial efforts will be developed and implemented to reduce this mortality. If bald or golden eagle mortality is documented, the FS will immediately coordinate with the FWS.
5. Power poles will be setback a minimum of 100 feet on both sides of riparian zones if feasible.
6. The operator will not operate vehicles in creeks or within their riparian zones or floodplains except at authorized crossing.
7. No vehicles will be operated during periods of inclement weather or wet soil conditions when noticeable disturbance, compaction or wheel-rutting would occur.
8. A Forest Service approved seed mix will be applied to ensure surface reclamation.
9. During road construction equipment will be operated to minimize unintentional movement of excavated material down slope.
10. Surface drainage controls will be installed at intervals that remove storm water from the roadbed avoiding discharge onto fill slopes unless the fill slope has been adequately protected. Route drainage structures so water disperses and infiltrates to prevent sedimentation of soil into water.
11. During construction continued livestock ingress and egress as well as the integrity of the allotment boundary fence must be maintained. Gates must be kept closed to maintain proper livestock control. New construction must avoid existing water transmission lines.
12. A recommended seed mix for the area will be applied to stabilize disturbed ground conditions when construction is complete.

13. An addendum to the existing Forest-wide roads analysis will be completed prior to road construction based on site specific road location.

Other Alternatives

The interdisciplinary team initially considered utilizing solar power to provide the electricity for the project. This type of power source would not be sufficient to provide for the needs required by more than one user.

No issues were identified from the responses that were received as a result of the public involvement efforts. No unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses have been identified that warrant consideration of additional alternatives; therefore, no other alternatives were identified.

Environmental Impacts of the Proposed Action and No Action Alternatives

This section provides a summary of the environmental impacts of each alternative. The discussion of environmental impacts focuses on how the proposed action and no action alternative meet the purpose and need and address key issues. The issues evaluated here were determined by the responsible officials to be the key issues related to the proposed action, based on scoping with public and agency specialists.

Table 1, provides a summary comparison of the environmental effects of the alternatives. It provides the information that is necessary to determine whether or not effects are significant and whether or not to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement. Detailed discussions of the affected environment and analyses of potential effects, including cumulative effects are located in the resource specialist reports and other supporting documentation, which are hereby incorporated by reference. These documents can be viewed in the project planning record. Resource specialist reports include:

- Biological Assessment for Threatened, Endangered Plant Species
- Biological Evaluation of Sensitive Plant Species and Evaluation of MIS Species
- Biological Assessment for Threatened, Endangered & Candidate Species
- Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Vertebrate Species
- Wildlife and Management Indicator Species Report
- Heritage Resource Report
- Rangeland Management Report
- Fuels Specialist Report
- Visual Specialist Report

Table 1 – Effects Summary

	Alternative One No Action	Alternative Two Proposed Action
Heritage Resources	No Action: no effect to sites potentially eligible for National Register of Historic Places.	April 5, 2005 – Utah State Historic Preservation Office concurred with the determination of No Historic Properties Affected. Action is consistent with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act

	Alternative One No Action	Alternative Two Proposed Action
Threatened, Endangered, and Sensitive Plants	No Action: 0 acres TES habitat affected. No effect to T&E Plants (BA pp. 3) and no impact to Sensitive Plants (BE pp 4, 5)	0 acres TES habitat affected because TES plants and suitable habitat do not occur in the project area. No effect to T&E plants (BA pp 3,) and no impact to Sensitive plants (BE pp 4, 5). Action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act and National Forest Management Act .
Threatened, Endangered and/or Sensitive Wildlife	No Action: 0 acres of potential habitat affected. No effect to T & E species (BA pp 4, 5) and no impact to Sensitive species (BE pp 4).	Only some 3 acres of potentially suitable Bald Eagle habitat will be disturbed during construction which is planned to occur when Bald Eagles are not present. (No critical habitat for the bald eagle has ever been designated on the Fishlake National Forest; Rodriguez 2005) May effect but is not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle and/or its habitat. (BA pp 4, 5) There is potentially suitable peregrine falcon nesting habitat adjacent to the Mud Flat site but, no known nest locations or observations of peregrines occur in the area. The temporary disturbance during construction to potentially suitable habitat may impact individual peregrine falcons but is not likely to cause a trend toward federal listing or a loss of viability. (BE pp 4) U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service has concurred with these determinations. Action is consistent with the Endangered Species Act .
Visual Management System	No Action: No effect, would not alter or change the current visual conditions.	Project is located within the visual quality objective of partial retention – presently a deviation from partial retention exists due to the human activities evident in the existing power poles and power lines and the I-70 freeway within site of the project sites.
Fire/Hazardous Fuels	No Action: No effect, would not change or alter fuel conditions.	The proposed action will not significantly change or alter fuel conditions on either of the project sites. (FSR pp 4)

	Alternative One No Action	Alternative Two Proposed Action
Rangeland Mgmt	No Action: 0 acres of livestock grazing directly affected. Proposed project located within Management Area 6B in the FLRMP 1986. 6B = emphasis on livestock grazing.	Approximately 2 acres of grazing potential would be removed and fenced, no significant reduction in grazing potential. Construction may disrupt livestock movement for a limited period of time.
Soils	No Action: No effect, would not change or alter hydric type soils.	There are no wetlands containing hydric type soils or potential floodplain areas located within or near either of the proposed project locations.
Hydrology	No Action: No effect, would not change or alter hydrologic conditions.	The project will disturb soils an ample distance from the stream channels and Mud Spring. The newly constructed road segment has the potential to catch and run water down its surface causing some erosion. Surface drainage controls will be required. Work will not occur within 100 feet of riparian resources. A seed mix for stabilization of erosive ground conditions is recommended.
Forest Service Management Indicator (MIS) Species	No Action: 0 acres of habitat directly affected for elk, mule deer, cavity nesters and Rydberg's milkvetch.	Across the Beaver Ranger District approximately 313,000 acres of habitat maintained or improved for elk, mule deer, and cavity nesters. May affect individual elk and mule deer and or their habitat but would not adversely affect population numbers or viability of these species; May affect various cavity nesters as shown in the Wildlife and MIS Report, but would not adversely affect population numbers or viability of these species (MIS pp 5, 6). There is no habitat for <i>A. perianus</i> (Rydberg's milkvetch) in the proposed treatment area. (BE pp 5) Action is consistent with the National Forest Management Act.

CUMULATIVE EFFECTS

Detailed discussions of cumulative effects are included in resource specialist reports. Cumulative effects that are relevant to a determination of significance are summarized in the previous Effects Summary section.

The effects of the past, present and reasonably foreseeable projects in combination with the proposed action are not expected to result in any measurable changes to heritage resources, threatened, endangered and sensitive plants and wildlife, Forest Service management indicator species, migratory birds, rangeland or soils. The cumulative effects area for most resources is the same as the project analysis area, with the exception of wildlife. The cumulative effects area for wildlife includes the Beaver Ranger District. The larger cumulative effects area for wildlife is based on the mobile nature of wildlife, particularly wide-ranging species such as the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, elk and deer.

Past and present and reasonably foreseeable activities within the cumulative effects area include private land ownership, grazing, recreation, timber and thinning operations, reforestation and seeding of burned areas, chaining, seeding of native and non-native species, fire suppression, natural and prescribed fire, pesticide application, noxious weed control, and other special uses such as mining, hydroelectric operations, firewood and post cutting, municipal water developments and irrigation diversion. Recreation-related activities include hunting, camping, day/picnic use, hiking, horseback riding, all-terrain vehicle (ATV & OHV) use, and campground/roads/trails maintenance and development. Grazing, chaining, seeding, fires, timber operations, irrigation diversion/development, and noxious weed control have altered riparian and upland vegetation composition and densities, which has reduced habitat for peregrine falcons, small mammals, and birds (prey species) in several cases and created habitat in others. Recreational activities and recreational infrastructure (roads, trails, structures and campground development) may contribute to peregrine falcon habitat fragmentation, habitat loss, creation of travel corridors, air pollution, audio and visual disturbance and other disturbances caused by wildlife/public interactions.

The effects of the past, present and reasonably foreseeable activities listed above in combination with this proposed action may affect but are not likely to adversely affect the bald eagle, peregrine falcon, elk, mule deer, hairy woodpecker, western bluebird and mountain bluebird individuals, but these cumulative effects would not adversely affect population numbers or viability of these species.

Surface disturbance is expected during setup, construction and operation of the sites. A small amount of vegetative cover would be removed to allow for access and operation of the sites, but this would not be expected to cause measurable changes in erosion or runoff. The newly constructed portion of road would likely be the one source of where erosion could be a short term occurrence. A seed mix which is known to do well in the area will be applied in order to stabilize erosive ground conditions. Mitigation Measures and best management practices (BMPs) will aid in limiting or preventing impacts to downstream water quality at the project sites. The construction of the proposed towers should have no impact on the water supplies in these areas. The proposed action will have no cumulative effects because the actual disturbance is relatively small and concentrated to an existing transportation corridor.

AGENCIES AND PERSONS CONSULTED

The Forest Service consulted the following federal, state, and local agencies, tribes and individuals during the development of this environmental assessment:

FEDERAL STATE, & LOCAL AGENCIES:

Six County Assn. Of Government
Millard County Commissioners
State of Utah Highway Patrol
Fremont Indian State Park
UDOT Right of Way, 4th Floor
Millard County
Utah Farm Bureau Fed.
Beaver City Plng. & Zoning Comm.
Piute County Sheriff
Millard County Sheriff
Six County Assn. Of Gvmt.
Beaver County Commission
Sevier County Planning Comm.
Sevier County EMS
UT Dept. of Transportation
Five County Assn. Of Gvmt.
Cynthia Cody, US EPA
Utah Geological Survey
Mayor Wade Bradshaw
Millard Planning Comm.
Sevier County Sheriff
Beaver County Sheriff
Jim Harris, Div. Of Water Quality

Utah State Road Commission
Bureau of Land Management
Senator Robert F. Bennett
US of America
BLM, Cedar City Fld Office
Congressman Chris Cannon
Representative Tom Hatch
Utah Div. Of Wildlife Resources
BLM, Richfield Fld Office
Mayor Delyle Carling
Senator Orrin G. Hatch
Congressman Jim Matheson
Representative Brad Johnson
Mayor Vernon Starley
Ben Burshia, BIA So. Paiute Office
Supervisor Robert Russell
Mike Empey
Gov. Office of Planning & Budget
Piute County Commission
Dept. of Nat. Resources
Fillmore Ranger District
Div. Forestry, Fire & State Lands
Manti-LaSal National Forest

OTHERS

Missouri Flat LTD Partnership
Cove Fort Ranch L.C.
Paul L. Young
Jack Brookman
Hugh A Morgan
Arnold L. Wilson
Calvin Kesler (Trustees)
Richard Gonzalez
Robert T. Harmon
Udell Jolley (Trustees)
Corp Pres. Church JC of LDS
Sodbusters LLC
James H. or Sarah J. Trato
Adam F. Mihalstn

Wild Utah Forest Campaign
Pat Yardley
Merrill & Pete Yardley
Sulpherdale Geothermal
Robert White (Trustee)
David K. Puff
Bigler Properties LC
Deseret Investors Group
Eldon A Eliason (Trustees)
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The Wilderness Society
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Resort Properties Inc
Property Resources Inc.
Utah Mining Assn.
Brent Farnsworth

TRIBES

USA Trush Kanosh Band Paiute Indians
Chair. Geneal Anderson, Paiute Tribe of UT
Lora Tom, Paiute Tribe
Hopi Tribal Council, Chairman

Utah Power & Light Co
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Albert Goldstein, MD
Phillip A. Lindberg
Marion L. Kesler
Paul K. Evans
Delano Development Corp.
Lally McMahan, Forest Guardians
Glen Nebeker
Bob Brister, SUWA
Dennis Miller
Back Country Horsemen
Michael E. Noel, Blue Ribbon Co.
Lee Nielson, UP&L
Bryan Bird, Sierra Club
Russ Cowley
Rainer Huck
Robert Yardley
Peter Vander Meide
Willard B. Powers
Robert T. Miller (Trustee)
Frank Swarzkopf (Trustees)
Jim Catlin, Wild Utah Project
Ray Alan Yardley

Ralph Pikyavit, Kanosh Band Rep.
Skull Valley Band of Goshute Indians
Ganavar Timican, Koosharem Band

APPENDIX A

Interdisciplinary Team Members And Resource Reports in Project Planning Record

Interdisciplinary Team Members

Archaeologist – Bob Leonard
Botanist – Dave Tait,
Fuels Specialist – Cory Norman
Hydrology – Adam Solt
Interdisciplinary Team Leader – Kathy Twitchell
Landscape Architect – Dave Christensen
NEPA – Chris Wehrli
Recreation Specialist – Cindy Mackelprang
Roads Engineer – Dan Bond
Soils – Michael D. Smith
Writer/Editor – Kathy Twitchell
Zone Wildlife Biologist – Steve Flinders

Resource Reports

Biological Assessment of Threatened and Endangered Plant Species,
July 6, 2005 – David A. Tait

Biological Evaluation of Sensitive Plant Species and Evaluation of MIS Species,
July 6, 2005 – David A. Tait

Biological Assessment for Threatened, Endangered & Candidate Species,
October 27, 2005 – Steve Flinders

Biological Evaluation for Sensitive Vertebrate Species,
October 27, 2005 – Steven Flinders

Fuels Specialist Report, July 7, 2005 – S. Cory Norman

Heritage Resource, February 28, 2005 - Robert W. Leonard

Hydrology Report, December 19, 2005- Adam Solt

Range Report, Oct. 26, 2005 – Douglas J. Sorensen

Soil Resource, January 5, 2006 - Michael D. Smith

Wildlife and Management Indicator Species (MIS) Report, Oct. 27, 2005 – Steve Flinders

APPENDIX B

Location Maps
And
Typical Site Plans

